

Hints and Tips

Effective partnerships

Why effective partnerships matter

Lots of groups and activities led by older people and other community activities happen through partnerships.

- Partnerships between community groups.
- Partnerships between teams in local authorities or the NHS and community groups.
- Partnerships between big organisations that provide services to people and small groups led by older people.
- Partnerships between 2 groups or 3, or 10 and more.
- Every combination in between.

Policies such as Reshaping Care for Older People and the new Integration of health and social care say that partnerships with people who use services and with community groups are a good thing.

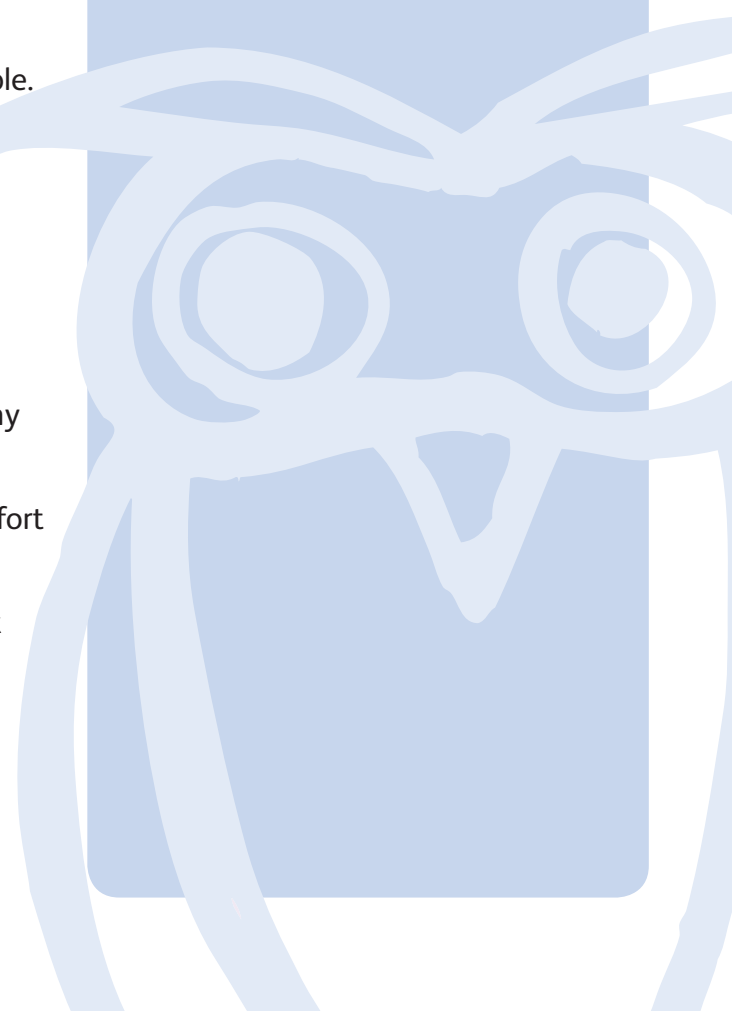
When a partnership goes well, there are benefits to many people.

When it does not go well, it can feel like a lot of extra effort for little or no benefit to anyone.

These Hints are to help you have partnerships that work well for older people and for people in other roles and settings who work alongside groups led by older people.

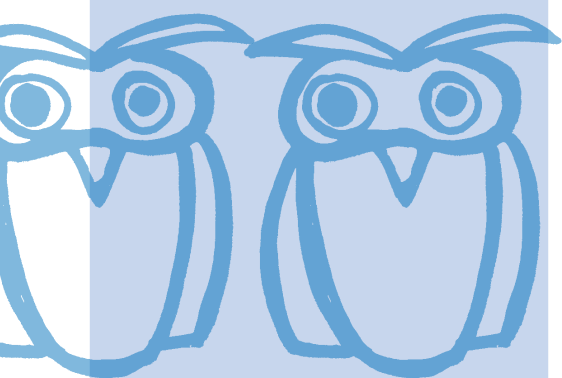
"We've got a good partnership with the local authority. We come up with the ideas together, they find the money and we find the volunteers. We've been working together for years and our joint work has benefitted many people in the area."

"Our main partnership is with another community group. Together we've developed a service for older people who otherwise wouldn't get out much. Neither of us could have done this on our own."



“We are all in it because we care about older people having a better life.”

“We spent longer talking about whose logo went first on the publicity than about what older people wanted and how the project was working. I don’t think they understood about partnerships.”



What is a partnership?

A partnership is:

- two or more people or organisations,
- who are working together for a shared goal and
- who each contribute and each gain.

The partners will be sharing some – and ideally most – elements of:

- Ideas.
- Knowledge and skills.
- Money.
- Other resources – such as buildings or administrative support.
- The work to realise the shared goal.
- The work to keep the partnership going – such as sending information round to partners and hosting meetings.
- Managing the risks that face the partnership - looking out for risks, minimising the likelihood and the consequences or potential risks, and taking responsibility if anything does go wrong. This includes risks for individual older people who get a service or are involved in the work the partnership does, but it goes much wider than that.
- Keeping other people informed about what is happening.
- Credit for the achievements.

The resources the partners contribute may be very different in type or size. It helps when ideas and experience are seen as another type of resource, alongside money, premises, contacts, etc.

Features of effective partnerships

These factors have been highlighted in lots of research and good practice reports. They also reflect the experience of groups led by older people and the other people who work alongside them.

Being in it for the long term

A partnership can be for a short period/specific task, or can be an on-going relationship. But the partnership usually works best when the partners take a long-term view.

Shared understanding of what it is about

Everyone is clear about:

- What the shared goal is.
- What is inside and what is outside the partnership.
- Whether it is a short-term or an on-going relationship.

There are no hidden agendas.

People understand that each of the partners has other responsibilities and priorities outside the partnership.

People respect what each partner brings

Each partner recognises that everyone contributes something to the partnership.

They also realise that no-one can achieve this goal on their own (or at least not as easily or as well).

Everything in the list of ideas, skills and so on is important. The partners do not behave as if some contributions - such as money - bring more status than others. There is a tool in these Hints to help you identify what all the partners do bring.

Trust between the partners

The partners trust each other enough.

The trust extends to how people behave outside the shared venture. An example is not doing something to make life difficult for the other person/organisation without telling them.

Fairness

Each of the partners is happy with the balance between what they contribute and what they gain.

They are also happy with the balance over time – which is why taking the long-term view and thinking about the aims helps.

The contribution of each member is recognised, even though it is a different type. Fairness is not the same as uniformity.

Being realistic

The partners do not expect the partnership to deliver results too soon.

They don't expect it to solve all their other problems.

They know that a new partnership cannot solve a current crisis – but it can help them deal with the future ones.


Tips

You can use the factors here to help you work out if a partnership is working well.

You can use the phrases here to help you explain to the other partners if something does not feel right. That way the conversation is about the features of an effective partnership, rather than about what someone has done.

Effective Partnership checklist

Feature	Does it feel right?	What would help? <i>Making it clearer?</i> <i>Changing the balance in what we each do?</i> <i>Something else?</i>
In it for long-term		
Shared understanding of purpose		
Respecting each contribution		
Trust		
Fairness		
Being realistic		



What do the partners in your project contribute?

It may be worth listing out what each of the partners brings to the partnership.

- This uses the list of features of successful projects. You can add other items that are important in your particular situation.
- You can see whether each aspect of partnership working is covered by at least one partner. If some aspects have nothing from any current partner, you may need to give this a bit more attention.
- You can see whether one partner is doing a lot of the work and others are not contributing as much.
- You can use this as the start of a conversation about whether the current pattern is fair in the circumstances of the project – and it might be. You can then decide if you want to spread the effort more over the next year or so, or bring in someone else to help with an aspect that everyone is finding it difficult to do.
- This can be useful at the start of a partnership.
- It can be useful to do again every few years, to check that a long-standing partnership is still fair, and is not at risk if one person moves jobs, for example.

“We got really angry each time the Councillor got into the local newspaper talking about the project that we had helped the Council develop. They gave the grant but it was our volunteers who were doing all the work. We talked to the person we deal with at the Council and explained that it didn’t feel fair and how the volunteers felt they weren’t appreciated.

Next time he said lovely things about us and the photo had some of the volunteers and our chairman. He didn’t mean to upset us, they just hadn’t thought about it. But we hadn’t realised how much the Council wanted the publicity to show people that something positive is happening on this issue.”

Aspect	Partner 1	Partner 2	Partner 3	Partner 4
Ideas				
Knowledge and skills				
Money				
Other resources				
Work to deliver the project				
Keeping the partnership going				
Managing risks				
Keeping other people informed				
Sharing credit				



Here is an example

Partnership list for Hillside Older People's Arts Project

Aspect	Older People's Forum	Hillside Older People's Group	Hillside Community Arts Centre	Health and Social Care Partnership
Ideas	Identified the gap of arts activities for older people with higher support needs	Checking out with people in Hillside Talking to people in local care home	Ideas on arts that people can try	Feeding in ideas from what we've heard from people we support, especially older people with higher needs
Knowledge and skills	Find out what people in other areas are doing on this	Local knowledge of Hillside area Contacts with older people here	Know about arts groups	Access to OTs, Physios, dementia team and other skills as needed
Money	Writing grant applications for the project			Grant to cover pilot for 6 months
Other resources			Venue Materials for taster sessions Another arts group at Centre can help with designing the first posters	
Work to deliver the project	Help with recruitment of volunteers from across the area	Recruiting volunteers from local area Managing and supporting the volunteer team	Sessional arts tutors	
Keeping the partnership going	Write and circulate notes from partnership meetings		Meeting room for planning stage and on-going	
Managing risks	Watching the money side	Good processes to support volunteers Good processes on keeping members who need extra support safe	Watching that the new project fits in ok to rest of arts centre activities	Back up advice and help to keep people safe as needed, such as training for volunteers
Keeping other people informed	Telling our members Regular updates through our newsletter and website	Telling members and other groups in Hillside	Publicity within the Centre	Telling colleagues in NHS and council
Sharing credit	Do this through newsletter Include updates from each of main partners in future items	Tell people and groups in Hillside area how it is going	Include in arts centre website, Facebook, twitter items	Brief Councillors and senior managers Support the launch of the project
	Use each partner's logo on everything			
	Use the project name and logo once the older people have chosen it			

Partnership agreements

Sometimes it is useful to have a written note of how the partners will work together.

- You can write this at the start.
- You can review it and update it as circumstances change.

What the partnership is

This is the scope and purpose of the partnership.

- It can be small or a large aim.
- It is also useful to say if it is a short-term or an on-going partnership.

Who are the partners?

- Are people there as the representative of, on behalf of, a group or organisation?
- If someone moves jobs or leaves the group, does the partner give a commitment to get someone else to replace them in the partnership group?
- Do the partners take responsibility for keeping colleagues in their organisation or network informed about what is happening in the partnership and project?

How will the partners keep in touch?

- Do you have meetings? – And if so, how regularly?
- Will there be communication through emails, etc?
- How does information get shared?
- Who takes on the job of doing the co-ordinating?

Decision making

In most partnerships, there are very few decisions that need to get made. Most of the business is information sharing and discussing ideas or issues, and feeding these back to your own organisations or networks. But it is useful to note how decisions do get made.

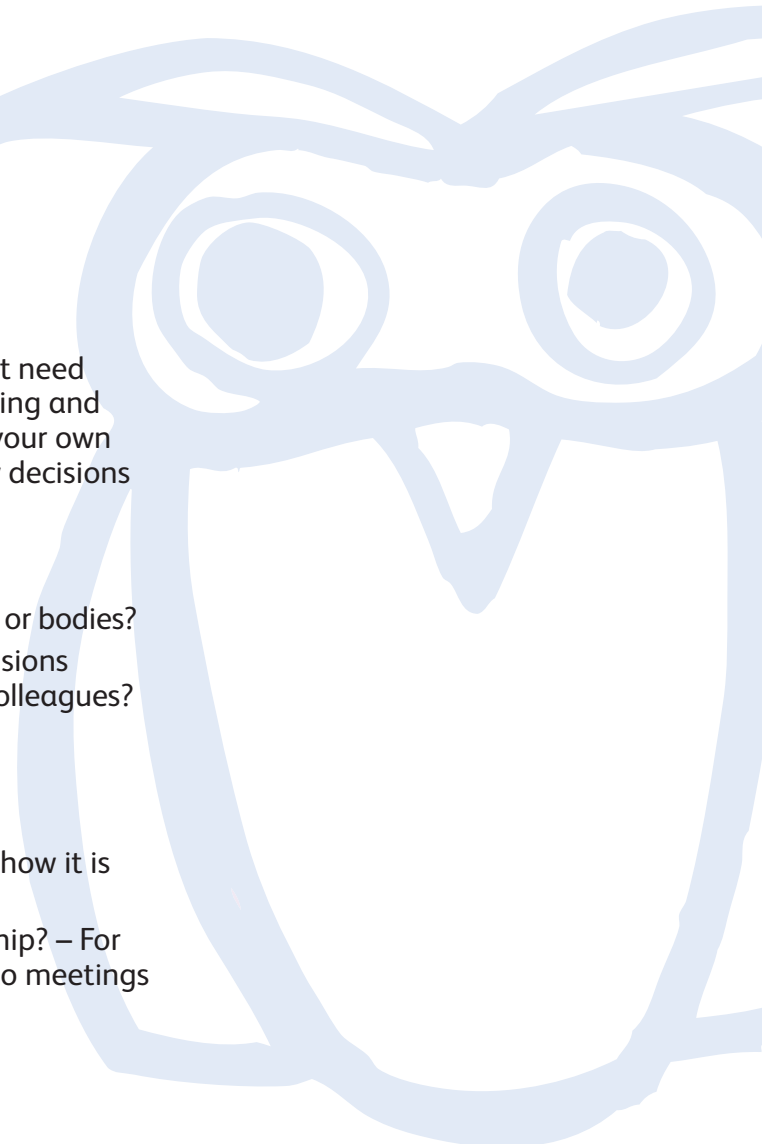
- How do the routine decisions get made?
- Which decisions need to be referred to other people or bodies?
- Can the people in the partnership group make decisions together, or do they have to check this back with colleagues? You could set a timescale on this.

Reviews and making changes

- How does the partnership review what it does and how it is working?
- How does one partner withdraw from the partnership? – For example, if they no longer have the time to come to meetings and feel it is no longer a priority for them.
- How do new partners join the partnership?

“When the project began we helped get it off the ground. I think we helped the other groups get together as they all knew us but didn’t know each other. But they don’t really need us now. We’ve been sending apologies for nearly a year. It’s time to say that we’re pulling back and wish them all the best.”

“The Forum did all the organising in the first few years. We can offer to take that on now.”



Here is an example

Partnership agreement: Developing Arts for Older People in Hillside Date: January 2015

Scope of our partnership

The aims of our partnership are:

- To develop more opportunities for older people to take part in the creative arts over the next 10 years.
- To reach out to older people who are socially isolated and need extra support, and make arts activities welcoming and inclusive.

We will start with a project giving taster sessions, that will be delivered by the Older People's Group and Community Arts Centre.

Each activity we develop will be the responsibility of one or two organisations, and that will be clear. The other organisations and groups in this partnership will give encouragement and support where they can.

Who the partners are

The initial partners are:

- Hillside Older People's Group.
- Hillside Community Arts Centre.
- District Older People's Forum.
- District Health and Social Care Partnership, through the Older People's Outreach Team.

We hope that more partners will get involved over time. Any existing partner can suggest that another group gets involved.

How we organise the partnership

- The Older People's Forum will be the central point for organising how we work as partners.
- We will meet once a month at the planning and setting up stage.
- We expect to meet every 3-4 months once things settle down.
- In between we'll keep each other informed.
- Each partner will identify one person as their contact. That person will keep colleagues and members up to date and check points with them as needed.
- We will acknowledge the role of the other partners in publicity about the project within our own organisations and especially in anything that goes outside.

We expect the main decisions to be around putting in grant applications, and later on how the overall project should develop.

We know that people sometimes cannot come to meetings, or will want to run decisions past colleagues. So we will aim to give people a week to get comments and suggestions round after a meeting before following up on major action points.

Spring cleaning your partnerships

It can be easy to get involved in several partnerships that were all really useful at the start but now are less important.

If this happens to your group or team, it is a good idea to review the partnerships in which you are involved in every year or so.

These are the questions to ask about each of your partnerships.

- What contribution are we making now?
- Is our involvement making a difference?
- How much time and effort does it take to be in the partnership?
- How much benefit do we get from still being involved in the partnership?
- Should we increase our involvement?
- Could we support the activity or the partners in another way?

About Wisdom in Practice

Wisdom in Practice is a project which supports and promotes the development of services and other activities led by older people. It is funded by the Scottish Government through the Equalities Programme and is run by Outside the Box. There is a range of resources for groups, including publications, how to guides, events and development support for individual groups and projects.

This is one of a series of Hints and Tips on topics which groups led by older people have said help them in starting their groups and keeping going.

Wisdom in Practice has its own website
www.wisdominpractice.org.uk



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